

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting

Saturday, January 22, 2005

Arizona Game and Fish Department - Phoenix Office

Committee Members Present

Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Julie Decker, Bureau of Land Management
Bill Dowdle, Arizona State Land Department
Ron Eichelberger, Sportsmen Group
Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
John P. King, Livestock Grower
Joe Melton, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
James O'Haco, Livestock Grower
Richard Rico, Special Services Assistant Director, AGFD
Phil Smith, Sportsmen Group
Joe Underwood, Sportsmen Group

Committee Members Absent

Shelby Bennett, Livestock Grower
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
Hubby Grounds, Livestock Grower
George McKay, Coronado National Forest

Others Present

Josh Avey, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD
Sue Chilton, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
David Hoyle, Sportsmen Group
Margie Latta, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Chris Mitchell, Sportsmen Group
Sal Palazzolo, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Sandy Reith, Volunteer Coordinator, AGFD
Jim Underhill, Sportsmen Group
Mark Weise, Development Branch Chief, AGFD

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/ Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. Chairman Sanford Cohen initiated an introduction of those present.

New Members/Presentations

Josh Avey presented a plaque to Joe Underwood in appreciation for serving on the Committee. Mr. Underwood is a Hunter Education Instructor and an avid sportsman.

Phil Smith announced that he had accepted a position with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) as the Wildlife Area Manager for Region VI. Since Department employees are ineligible to be voting members on the Committee, Mr. Smith submitted his resignation. Chairman Cohen stated that Mr. Smith has been a valuable member on the Committee and that he would be missed. Mr. Smith introduced David Hoyle, a fellow member of the Chandler Rod and Gun Club, and nominated him as a possible replacement. A motion was passed to submit a nomination of David Hoyle to the Commission for approval.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Committee accepted the meeting minutes for July 27, 2004.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Melton, who was Chairman of this Committee prior to his appointment to the Arizona Game and Fish Commission (Commission), said it was a pleasure to be back working with this Committee and many of the same members. He commented on the importance of the work the Committee does, stating that the Commission is often addressing issues involving private lands.

Updates/Current Issues

Josh Avey updated the Committee on several items the Landowner Relations Program (LRP) has been involved with. He informed the Committee that the Babbitt Ranch, which won the National Private Land Stewardship Award in 2003, and the Department's Adopt-a-Ranch Program were recently featured on two episodes of the *Arizona Wildlife Views* television show, which averages 33,000 viewers in Phoenix alone.

Mr. Avey told the Committee that the Department did research and responded to a letter from Thomas Kelly, Attorney at Law, regarding a group of ranches threatening to close off access due to damages caused by wildlife and/or sportsmen. Several of the ranches on the list are continuing to work with the Department. The Department has not received a response. Mr. Avey said that there is a potential that there may be an effort by landowners to get private lands tags. The Department will continue to watch this issue.

Josh Avey informed the Committee that the Commission approved the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Border Patrol, regarding the closure of wildcat roads created during pursuit of undocumented aliens. However, the U.S. Border Patrol developed some concerns with the original document and refused to sign it. The agencies are now trying to create a revised MOU. LRP hopes to use this opportunity to create a stronger agreement, which will include some of the suggestions brought up during the last Committee meeting.

Mr. Avey told the Committee about the road grader position created in September using money from the Wildlife Conservation Fund (Indian gaming money). This additional position is helping the LRP to provide more consistent help to cooperating ranches rather than just reactive response to issues. Nearly a dozen ranches have been completed and several more are lined up. The road maintenance has been very well received. Richard Rico added that there is a simple one-page agreement to show that roadwork is being traded for public access on the ranches; the Department

does a simple cost-benefit analysis to assure that State gifting restrictions are not violated. Mr. Avey said that the logistics of moving the equipment from one ranch to the next is sometimes an obstacle. Jon Fugate suggested that we ask the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club to assist if money is needed to rent a trailer for hauling the grader. Mr. Avey asked that if Committee members hear of ranches where this program may help, they should let the LRP know and the road grader most likely can get to it within three months at the current time. Commissioner Melton asked if this service had been offered at the Boquillas Ranch. Mr. Avey explained that road maintenance has been offered and although ranchers and members of the Navajo Nation sounded favorable, the Tribal Council has not yet responded. Sanford Cohen suggested discussing this program with the Fletcher Ranch since the issues there have not been fully remedied. Commissioner Melton agreed that the granted road closure has not totally fixed the problem.

Josh Avey informed the Committee about a new agreement with the Arizona State Parks Department, which gives the Department potential access to about three million dollars of OHV grants. The LRP is working on several proposals to use this largely untapped source of money. The LRP is also working on the first acquisition project specifically for access. Funding from the Arizona State Parks Department is being used to purchase a 30-acre parcel in order to establish a permanent right-of-way to Peck Canyon.

Mr. Avey informed the Committee about another first for the program. Using funding from the Landowner Incentive Program, the LRP is completing the Department's first conservation easement. This project, at the O Bar O Ranch, has received a lot of support and will benefit the landowner, public, and at-risk species of wildlife.

The LRP will be hosting a meeting of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for the first time. This working group discusses the programs each state uses to address access issues.

Josh Avey introduced the Department's new Volunteer Coordinator, Sandy Reith. The creation of this position is one of the components to help see if we can organize the new type of volunteer effort, which the Committee has been discussing at prior meetings. LRP has been working with Sandy Reith and Phil Smith on the initial paperwork for this project.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Sanford Cohen said members of the Prescott Open Trails Association met with Thomas Kelly and some of the ranchers on the list; the impression was that the group desired private lands tags. At this point, the Commission would propose other alternatives to help the ranchers. Richard Rico said that the LRP now has more personnel and many new funding sources, including conservation easements, to address the landowners' impacts. Some discussion ensued regarding the Boquillas Ranch.

Joe Underwood informed the Committee of problems the Rail X Ranch is having with off-highway vehicles (OHV) and wildcat shooting. He suggested a big OHV outreach and enforcement effort. The Committee discussed enforcement strategies and the need for more officers. Phil Smith stated that this leads back to the idea discussed at previous meetings– the need for the new volunteer effort. Mr. Smith brought the new Committee members up to date on the idea and told how volunteers have helped make up for the lack of sufficient law enforcement by patrolling the Desert Wells Multi-Use Area, reporting violations, and informing recreationists of pertinent laws. Commissioner Melton said that this idea was around years ago, but nothing ever came of it. Phil Smith replied that we have seen it working effectively at Desert Wells; all we have to do is make it

official so volunteers can get some training, recognition, and support. Mr. Smith explained that getting it set up is a slow process, but he added there is progress. John King said that the real solution is to designate sacrifice areas in various locations. Sanford Cohen said the Arizona OHV Legislative Workgroup, which is working to create uniform laws to allow for better law enforcement, is trying to set it up so some of the funds from citations will be used to develop OHV areas.

Sue Chilton said that her term on the Commission is nearly over. The Committee then discussed the Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Proposal. The Commission is scheduled to address this wilderness proposal at the February meeting. A motion was approved by the voting members of the Committee to send another letter to the Commission stating how the wilderness proposal reduces opportunities for public access, enforcement, and wildlife management.

Next Meeting

Phil Smith made a motion to schedule another meeting prior to the summer meeting. The Committee discussed it and decided to try it. The next LLSRC meeting will be held at the Arizona Game and Fish Department in conjunction with another Commission meeting. The meeting is scheduled to begin Sunday, April 17, 2005, at 9:00 a.m.

The Committee decided that the summer meeting should be scheduled in conjunction with the Arizona Cattle Growers Association Convention, which will be held in Sedona from July 17-20. Committee members will be informed of the date and time of that meeting once it has been determined.

Action Items:

1. Present to the Commission the nomination of David Hoyle as a sportsmen's representative on the Committee. (LRP Staff)
2. Meeting minutes distributed. (LRP Staff)
3. Contact Doc Lane to schedule the summer LLSRC meeting at such a time as to avoid conflicts with ASLD, Federal Land, and Game meetings. Inform Committee. (LRP Staff)
4. Prior to the February 11, 2005 Commission meeting, send a letter in opposition to the Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Proposal. (Sanford Cohen)
5. Continue working with the Volunteer Coordinator to see if we can set up organizing, training, and supporting volunteers for outreach and monitoring efforts. (LRP Staff)
6. Discuss road maintenance and other alternatives with Jim Fletcher, Fletcher Ranch, since the issues there have not been fully remedied. (LRP Staff)
7. Check into the possibility of designating more OHV areas around the state to reduce pressure on ranch lands. (LRP Staff)